



**National Association of
Community Health Centers, Inc.®**

June 17, 2002

The Honorable W.J. "Billy" Tauzin, Chairman
Energy and Commerce Committee

The Honorable Michael Bilirakis, Chairman
Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee

2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable William Thomas, Chairman
Ways and Means Committee

The Honorable Nancy Johnson, Chairwoman
Ways and Means Health Subcommittee

1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

SENT VIA FACSIMILE

Dear Chairpersons Tauzin, Thomas, Bilirakis, and Johnson:

On behalf of the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC), I am writing to express our gratitude and support for the inclusion of Section 310, Providing Safe Harbor for Certain Collaborative Efforts that Benefit Medically Underserved Populations, into the text of the *Medicare Modernization and Prescription Drug Act of 2002*. NACHC believes that this provision will significantly help improve access to care for millions of health centers' medically underserved patients and will help to further the goals of the House and Senate and President Bush to expand funding and access to America's Health Centers.

For almost a decade, health centers have sought such a safe harbor from the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Office of the Inspector General (OIG). Yet, despite favorable indications from the OIG, no action has ever been finalized. Unfortunately, NACHC estimates that this period of administrative delay has cost health centers and their patients millions of dollars in free, discounted, or donated items and services that could have freed up valuable Federal grant dollars to further expand access to care to underserved patients in their communities. By including the safe harbor in this legislation, Congress will ensure that health centers are able to enter into these arrangements that will expand services for their patients while safeguarding against abuse.

Thank you again for including Section 310 in this legislation. We wholeheartedly support the inclusion of this provision and look forward to working with you on this and other provisions that are critical to help health centers expand and improve access to care for the medically underserved.

Please let us know if my staff or I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Van Coverden
President and CEO

Cc: The Honorable Jerry Weller
The Honorable John Lewis